

Input to the Public consultation on the European Solidarity Corps – March 2017

Who we are

EFIL is the umbrella organisation of AFS organisations in Europe. AFS Intercultural Programs is an international volunteer-based organisation promoting intercultural learning. For this purpose, it established a subsidiary, SENTIO (<http://www.sentionetwork.org>), running volunteering abroad programmes for young people 18+. 9 out of the 28 EFIL members are also members of SENTIO and run volunteering abroad programmes.

Several AFS-SENTIO organisations are also coordinating, sending and hosting organisations within the EVS programme and are willing to grow in hosting, reaching a total of more than 50 volunteer placements, and potentially also host trainees in their offices. These can be much more depending on the funding provided by ESC. EFIL itself is willing to host 2 interns a year.

Our recommendations for designing the ESC programme

- A **clear distinction between volunteering and employment strand**, with the employment strand only accessible to organisations working in the social sector.
- A **new budget for ESC**, which does not hinder the Erasmus+ budget, and its potential growth as from 2021.
- A **common access point** for organisations applying for ESC.
- ESC should be **based on EVS and the recommendations from the European Year of Volunteering-PAVE**. ESC should not be just EVS, but a new programme which builds on EVS as best practice, but then expands it, tackling the issues that the existing programme has, and being the trigger for the development of volunteering policies and programmes at national level.
- ESC should also be **open to countries outside the EU**.
- ESC should be based on the **accreditation/screening and essential role of sending, coordinating and hosting organisations**. **Sending organisations are crucial** to reach out to young people and support them in the process of 1) being motivated to engage in volunteering 2) being prepared for the volunteering experience 3) support the young person upon return to involve him/her in volunteering activities in the home country.

The **hosting organisations could be screened by the coordinating organisation** directly and avoid the accreditation process which might be a high burden for small solidarity organisations. Hosting organisations need to be equipped with the adequate resources and training to support the volunteers during the stay. **The coordination role is essential to guarantee quality and handling of finances**, and it can be played either by the sending or hosting organisation.

- **Increased funding need to be provided to coordinating organisations** for them to be able to invest staff time in reaching out to young people, train and support them. It needs to be taken into account that coordinating organisations invest much time for each applicant, and applicants can still easily drop out of the programme: this staff cost need to be compensated. It is also important to consider the limited ability of participating organisations to provide co-funding for

the volunteer placement. An increase of 300 euros per young person taking part in a long term mobility (10-12 months) would allow volunteering organisations to engage with ESC. The issue is not willingness of young people or organisations to engage in volunteering abroad, but lack of funding is a great limit.

- **Higher allowances** should be provided for the subsistence and accommodation of volunteers. Current lump sums in EVS are not enough.
- ESC should be **accessible to all young people, disadvantaged and not**.
- ESC should have **short waiting times for starting the volunteering experience**. The strategic EVS should be taken as a best practice, therefore allowing the applicant organisation to determine the other participating organisations at a later stage, and therefore recruit participants (with their sending organisations) once the project is approved.
- **ESC accredited organisations who meet high quality criteria should have a sustained access to funding**, and therefore be able to offer continuously volunteer placements. In this regard, the record of successful conducted ESC activities in the past should serve to create criteria for allocation of funds.
- In order to **cater on experienced European networks of volunteering organisations**, European level framework agreements could be provided. These European organisations have a solid network of hosting and sending organisations and can ensure to offer volunteering abroad experiences to a great number of young people, with high quality.
- Intra-country mobility should be possible, but **cross-border mobility should remain the focus**, in order to develop the feeling of European citizenship, and solidarity.
- The ESC should be a brand and young people taking part to this programme should receive information from the ESC National/European agency about being part of this programme.
- **ESC should enable and support high quality non-formal learning, including pre-departure, on arrival, mid-term and evaluation trainings**. We recommend that organisations which are able to do so should be allowed to organize seminars themselves and receive the necessary funding to do so. Organisations with a small number of volunteers should be able to send their volunteers to existing seminars offered on national or regional level. The timing of these seminars should be better coordinated with participating organisations.
- The training on the project content should be provided by the hosting organisation.
- **Training on intercultural learning, European citizenship and communication skills is key for the success of the ESC programme**. This training should be provided by sending and hosting organisations in-house with adequate funding provided or by experts that are subcontracted by the NA (see above). EFIL members are available to provide expert trainers.
- The **SENTIO network** will provide to all the volunteers engaging in ESC through SENTIO members, the **Global Competence Certificate – GCC**, which has been developed and tested for volunteering abroad programmes run by SENTIO in the last 3 year. This GCC can be offered, for a fee, also to other ESC organisations.
- The **language training should be provided by the ESC National/European agency and be preferably live or at least with a much better version of the OLS**. Access to the OLS should be given to participants **long before arrival**.
- **Recognition of competences developed: Youthpass is much too complicated** for the language used and its long format, therefore it is not attractive. Young people need to be supported by



mentors in personal reflect on learning, but the tool to showcase this learning need to different: Open badges can be an option.

- For a **greater impact at personal and organisational level, long-term volunteering experiences are preferred, however short term ESC should be offered, especially targeting disadvantaged youth.**
- For **short term ESC** for disadvantaged youth, the following points should be taken into consideration 1) higher organisational management lump sums are needed because a more professional approach is required, and at the same time there is a higher risk of drop outs, therefore staff time is invested on young people that will not take part in the programme. 2) stays of 3 weeks as a first experience: these young people often work to sustain themselves and cannot stay a long time without a job. It would be interesting to include the possibility to extend these short-term volunteering experiences 3) easier registration: even if at the moment the application for short term EVS is simpler, still young people need assistance 4) additional mentoring during the placement: hosting organisations are often not used to this target group and often don't realise what it means.
- The **24,000 young people registered in the ESC platform today** should be informed clearly as soon as possible about opportunities available for them. There is a high risk that the young people who registered will be disappointed about ESC if they are not supported right away regarding their interest in volunteering abroad. On the ESC portal they **should find sending organisations among which to choose, so that these can support them and ensure that the motivation for volunteering abroad is kept alive, while searching for a project.**